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ABSTRACT

Parents who are sufficiently aware of the specific campus resources available to help students confront barriers to academic success, may serve as referral agents for their children. This study combined the interest of parents in helping their child have a successful experience at college, with the availability of the "Resource Manual," which lists and briefly describes the variety of resources available to students at the University of Maryland at College Park. During two sessions of the 1988 Summer Parent Orientation, a parents' support project was described, in which parents would be given information sufficient to help them serve as resource referral agents for their children. Sets of interested parents (N=69) were identified and sent a copy of the Resource Manual. Sets of parents (N=50) were randomly selected from a Parent Orientation session in which no mention of the parents' support project was made to serve as a comparison group. Students whose parents participated in the parents' support project persisted at significantly higher rates than students in the comparison group, and did so in good academic standing. Giving parents support materials seemed to be an effective and cost-efficient way of helping their students achieve their academic goals. (ABL)

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Parents as Referral Agents: A Retention Intervention

Research Report # 10-90

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group

Vivian Boyd, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt,
Thomas Magoon, Bekele Molla, John Van Brunt

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Computer time for this project has been provided in full through the Computer Science Center of the University of Maryland at College Park.

Parents as Referral Agents: A Retention Intervention

Parents as Referral Agents: A Retention Intervention

Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Research Report # 10-90

Summary

Parents who take an active interest in their child's college experience may be serving an important function as an influence encouraging their child to remain in college until graduation. Parents who are aware enough of the specific campus resources available to help students confront barriers to academic success to serve as referral agents for their child may contribute doubly toward that goal. The present study combines the interest of parents in helping their child have a successful experience at college, with the availability of the Resource Manual, which lists and briefly describes the variety of resources available to students at the University of Maryland at College Park.

During two sessions of the 1988 Summer Parent Orientation, a parents' support project was described, in which parents would be given information sufficient to help them serve as resource referral agents for their child. Sixty-nine sets of interested parents were identified, and were subsequently sent a copy of the Resource Manual. Fifty sets of parents were randomly selected from a Parent Orientation session in which no mention of the parents' support project was made, to serve as a comparison group. In January at the time grades were mailed, participating parents were sent an evaluation form, in part to assess the use and usefulness of the manual, and in part to remind parents of the manual's potential helpfulness.

Students whose parents participated in the parents' support project persisted at significantly higher rates than students in the comparison group, and did so in good academic standing. Four semesters after matriculation, over 3/4 of the treatment group were still enrolled at UMCP, and 72% were in good academic standing, while 2/3 of the comparison group were still enrolled, and 58% were in good academic standing.

Giving parents printed material helpful in making parental support informed, at least about resources on campus, seems to be an effective and cost-efficient way of helping their students achieve their academic goals.

* Vivian Boyd, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Bekele Molla, John Van Brunt

Parents as Referral Agents: A Retention Intervention

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Parents who take an active interest in their child's college experience may be serving an important function as an influence encouraging their child to remain in college until graduation. Parents who can act as a referral agent when their child is in academic difficulty, particularly during the freshman year, may serve an even more critical role. Although at new student orientation, freshmen are introduced to the large variety of support services available on campus, this type of information typically is not remembered. Furthermore, it is unlikey that parents, despite their interest in their child's college experience, will be aware of the specific campus resources available to their child.

The Retention Study Group maintains a Resource Manual, the table of contents of which lists 23 common barriers to academic success. For each barrier, the manual lists and briefly describes resources that students can consider pursuing. Each entry gives a description of the resource or program, its location and, where relevant, the phone number to call either to set up an appointment or to obtain further information. Because students respond

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differently to different resource aids, the manual describes a variety of resource approaches (e.g., individual work, groups, tapes, written material) made available to help students achieve their academic goals.

The present study combines the availability of the Resource Manual with the interest of parents in helping their child have a successful first year at college.

METHOD

During two summer sessions of the 1988 Parent Orientation (i.e., orientation for the parents of incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland at College Park), the need for and uses of the Resource Manual were described to parents. Parents attending these sessions were shown copies of the manual, and were asked to demonstrate their interest in participating in the academic success of their child by adding their name, phone number, and Fall 1988 mailing address to a signup sheet of parents interested in participating in the parents support project. They were told that in the fall they would receive an updated copy of the Resource Manual so that they could feel informed about helping their child locate appropriate support services when and if such were needed during the academic year. Fifty parent sets attending the next week's parent orientation session, where there was no exposure to the project, served as a comparison group.

In early January 1989 an (unsigned) evaluation form was mailed to participating parents, in part to discover if the Resource Manual had been helpful to them during the fall semester and in

part to remind parents of the manual so they might continue to use it during the spring semester.

Outcome Variables

Two outcome variables were studied to determine the effect of intervention on students' retention rates:

1) academic persistence, defined as being enrolled for a given semester;

2) academic persistence in good standing, defined as being enrolled for a given semester and entering that semester with no academic action taken as a result of the previous semester.

All data concerning registration status and academic performance were obtained from University records. Data were analyzed for four semesters subsequent to the initial semester of intervention.

RESULTS

A total of 69 sets of parents (or 65% of the parent sets attending the two sessions of parent orientation in which the academic success project was described) indicated an interest in participating in the project.

Thirty-eight percent of the parent sets returned their project evaluation form mailed to them in early January 1989 right after fall semester grades were mailed. Since the evaluation was meant to be anonymous, there was no followup to increase the proportion of returned forms.

Thirty-one percent of those who returned the form reported

they had occasion to use the Resource Manual with their child during the fall semester. One hundred percent of those who used the manual reported they found it helpful.

Table 1 shows academic persistence rates for the treatment and comparison groups.

Table 1

Academic Persistence by Group

	Group			
	Treatment		Comparison	
Semester	n	%	n	%
initial n	69		50	
S '89	65	94	48	96
F '89	59	86	34	68*
S '90	56	81	33	66
F '90	53	77	32	64*

* $p < .05$

Table 2 shows rates of academic persistence in good standing for the two groups.

Table 2

Academic Persistence in Good Standing by Group

	Group			
	Treatment		Comparison	
Semester	n	%	n	%
initial n	69		50	
S '89	54	78	31	62*
F '89	51	74	29	58
S '90	53	77	29	58*
F '90	50	72	29	58

*$p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Students whose parents were sent a Resource Manual as part of the parents' support project persisted at higher rates than students whose parents were not sent the manual, for three of the four semesters studied. Two years after the semester of intervention, over 3/4 (77%) of the treatment group were still enrolled, and 72% were enrolled in good academic standing. On the other hand, approximately two-thirds (64%) of the comparison group were still enrolled, and only 58% were enrolled in good academic standing.

It is interesting to note that less than one-third of the parents who returned their evaluation form indicated they had occasion to use the Resource Manual during or immediately after their student's first semester at UMCP. Our mailing of the evaluation form was timed to coincide with the mailing of fall semester grades. It may be that the students in the treatment group were doing well enough both academically and non-academically not to warrant use of the Resource Manual. It may also be that parents began to use the manual, as problems arose, after receiving the evaluation and were reminded of its potential usefulness.

Parents play an important role as a base of support for their students. Giving parents printed material helpful in making that support informed, at least about resources on campus, seems to be an effective way of helping their students achieve their academic goals.